2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
NQ13 Gros Ventre NQ13



an outstanding war record, was known to be courageous and not afraid to die, yet, because he was quick-tempered and murdered a member of his own band, he forfeited what would have been a very good chance of becoming leader of his band. Second, a man who had the reputation of being woman-crazy, of bothering other men's wives, or who was guilty of rape or incest, would not be selected as leader. Furthermore, a man who wished to rise should control his temper, be good to others and avoid lying, back-biting and jealousy in regard to other prominent men. If he had these qualities, and was eminent at war, he would rise high in public esteem and be in the running not only as a leader of a band, or of the whole tribe, but also as Keeper of one of the Sacred Pipes."[1]

It was further explained by this same informant, The Boy, that if the leader died, there was a lot of talk both by members and non-members as to who was qualified to succeed. Those outside the band speculated on whom the choice would fall and said: "It ought to be so-and-so," and in this way attempt to influence the opinion as to which of the outstanding men of the band had the best qualifications. Soon a certain man became the leader, and once he was invited to a meeting of other band leaders he was "full-fledged."

In carrying out his duties, that is, in deciding when and where to move, the leader consulted with others and proceeded in a democratic fashion. If two or more bands were camped together, for instance, the leaders would consult among themselves and come to a decision as to whether or not the bands should remain together and as to where they should go. Other men would be present and any one of them apparently had the privilege of speaking his mind. "Suppose that the leader had decided that his band should leave the other and go to some particular spot. Someone in his band who disagreed with the decision would speak up and raise the question of, say, danger from the enemy. He would suggest a different place free from such danger and where game would be plentiful, where there was a good camping ground and sufficient water for the horses, etc. He would give his reasons in detail, and, if it

[1] The role of the Keepers of the Flat and Feathered Pipes is discussed in detail in Cooper, Ms. 1949.

2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
NQ13 Gros Ventre NQ13



seemed that the others present agreed with him, the leader would give in and have the crier announce the revised decision."

On the march, the leader went at the head of his band and showed the way. When several bands were together, the leader of one would have decided where he intended to go, and, if the other bands had decided to go along with this one, they followed, but were free to break away at any time.

The band to which either the Keeper of the Flat Pipe or the Keeper of the Feathered Pipe belonged had a certain distinction as there was a tendency when the tribe split for each to have a considerable following.

According to tradition, as related by The Boy, the Gros Ventres had had in the fairly remote past a formally selected chief or leader of the whole tribe. It was said that he functioned when the whole tribe was together and that his decisions in important matters were made in consultation with the chief men, including the leaders of all the bands. There was no regular council and anyone present might express his opinion. Often the Keepers of the Sacred Pipes were present at such meetings called by the tribal chief, but if they were not present they were supposed to be kept advised.

The last regularly selected leader of the whole tribe was said to have been White Eagle, who held this position in the last decades of the eighteenth century. It was said further that White Eagle was preceded by White Shield, of whom there are many stories extant, and that White Shield was preceded by Elk Going Against The Wind. The Boy gave the following information regarding the "election" of White Eagle. The account was given to The Boy by his father, Lame Bull, who had it from Old Man Gopher, a cousin of Lame Bull's paternal grandfather. "The Gros Ventres had been badly decimated by smallpox and only about 30 lodges were left.[8] Old Man Gopher and his sister, both of them very young children at the time, were the only survivors of their family. The old men among the survivors of the tribe got together and proceeded to choose a chief. White Eagle was then a young man

[8] A reasonable chronological estimate would identify this as a tradition referring to the devastating smallpox epidemic of 1780. For historical data, see p. 9.

3: Cooper E-5 (1938-1940) 1957
NQ13 Gros Ventre NQ13



position. In depositing the bundle on its bed, she would lower it gently in three stages, spitting at each one.

When the people were staying for any length of time at a given camp site, the Flat Pipe bundle, which was always kept inside the keeper's lodge during the night time, would regularly in good weather be taken out early in the morning at breakfast time by the co-keeper, with the customary grasping and carrying ritual, and hung up, stem-end pointing east just over the door of the keeper's lodge, not on its tripod. The outside of the keeper's lodge around the door up to full reaching height, about 6 or 7 feet, was painted red. The thong handle of the bundle was looped over, the two projecting ends of a stout pin, skewered horizontally in the tent cover, on the immediate line above the door at the upper edge of the red-painted area.

The bundle would hang over the door all day until about sundown when it would be brought back into the lodge for the night. In bringing it back, the co-keeper walked out of the lodge, unhooked and grasped the bundle, turned clockwise, walked all around the lodge clockwise, entered the lodge, proceeded clockwise to the incense hearth, dipped the stem end of the bundle three times in the smudge, and deposited the bundle in the usual ritual manner, as above described, at the far north end of the Pipe bed.

The final decision as to when and whether the camp, in which the Flat Pipe chanced to be, was to be moved was made by the head man especially the band chiefs and in the olden days the tribal chief too, the keepers having perhaps taken the initiative in calling them together. They would notify the Pipe keeper. Early the next morning the co-keeper with the usual ritual observances would take the Pipe bundle from its bed and carry it and its tripod outside the lodge a little to the north thereof, set up the tripod and hang the bundle on it. The tripod would be set up with two of its legs closer together, and with the third leg stretched out farther, its upper end projecting a little beyond the junction of the three legs. On this projecting end the bundle was hung by the thong handle looped over the end. On other occasions the bundle was hung on the tripod stem-end pointing east. But on this occasion the rule was superseded by another, namely, the third leg